



ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

ULSTER COUNTY NEWS INFORMATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Legislature to Permanently Establish November 26 as Sojourner Truth Day

The Ulster County Legislature will welcome special guests Barbara Allen, Sojourner Truth's sixth-generation granddaughter, and the young women who inspired the permanent designation of Sojourner Truth Day at Legislative Session tonight.

KINGSTON, NY—Chair Tracey Bartels announced that the Ulster County Legislature will permanently designate November 26 as Sojourner Truth Day at Legislative Session on February 15, 2022. Legislator Peter Criswell (City of Kingston, District 7) sponsored the permanent designation legislation as well as earlier proclamation measures for the years of 2020 and 2021.

November 26 was the day Sojourner Truth died in 1883. Advocates chose to commemorate her life on November 26 because the date her birth is unknown.

Chair Bartels (Towns of Gardiner and Shawangunk, District 16) said, “The Legislature is deeply honored that Barbara Allen, the sixth-generation granddaughter of Sojourner Truth, will join us from Battle Creek, Michigan, as we recognize and celebrate the countywide proclamation of November 26 as Sojourner Truth Day.”

The Chair adds, “The Legislature is grateful for the passionate advocacy of the four young women from the Kingston YMCA Farm Project who inspired local, county, and state lawmakers to establish an annual day of recognition. We applaud their determination to shine a light on the legacy of one of our nation’s most important human rights activists who courageously fought for abolition and universal suffrage,” said Bartels.



Top center: Barbara Allen, sixth-generation granddaughter of Sojourner Truth and author of *Remembering Great Grandma Sojourner Truth* and *Journey with Great Grandma Sojourner Truth*. Images 1 & 2: courtesy of Sixth-Generation.com. Image 3: Sojourner Truth print, by Aleshanee Emanuel, Dutchess Community College

Bottom row: Kingston YMCA Farm Project youth empowerment coordinators who inspired the designation of November 26 as Sojourner Truth Day: Aleshanee Emanuel, Dutchess Community College; Briana Gary, SUNY New Paltz; Anayathsyn (Ani) Castillo, SUNY New Paltz; and Jessica Alonso, Syracuse University. Photos courtesy of Kingston YMCA Farm Project.



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Barbara Allen is the sixth-generation granddaughter of Sojourner Truth. She is the descendent of Sophia, the infant daughter who Truth carried to freedom in 1826. She lives in Battle Creek, Michigan, where Truth resettled in 1867. Allen is the author of two children's books celebrating her great grandmother's legacy, *Remembering Great Grandma Sojourner Truth* and *Journey with Great Grandma Sojourner Truth*.

Barbara Allen said that when she joins Ulster County legislators on Tuesday, February 15 to witness the declaration of November 26 as Sojourner Truth Day, she will bring the spirit of her great-grandmother, Sojourner Truth, that lives on within her, to thank the county for its gracious recognition.

Barbara Allen states, "Establishing a Sojourner Truth Day in Ulster County is such an honor to a remarkable woman who spent her life crusading for others' civil rights while dealing with her own obstacles and memories of past injustices."

"My Great Grandma's spirit, and quest to speak the truth about freedom, equality, and inclusion is still alive and relevant today. We can relate to her words because they were inspired and true, everyone deserves to be free and included," says Allen.

"Sojourner's deep and sincere responsibility to her fellow man is what encourages me as a descendant to continue to speak out against injustices and write about her vision. Sojourner risked her life so that marginalized people could be seen, heard, and taken seriously," said Allen.

Barbara Allen shares, "I will pass on my work to my granddaughters one day and I envision them working hand in hand with such astonishing young women as Jessica Alonso, Ani Castillo, Aleshance Emanuel, and Briana Gary, the YMCA Farm empowerment coordinators, which I had the pleasure of working with recently. These women, with their amazing drive and commitment, will ultimately change the world."

The Kingston YMCA Farm Project's mission is to educate, nourish and connect the Kingston community to their urban farm. The Farm Project is committed to racial and economic justice and works to create a more equitable food system for all. The Farm Project leads antiracist action through their work in the food system, youth empowerment, and social justice-driven initiatives.

The movement to create a permanent Sojourner Truth Day was inspired by four young women who work as empowerment coordinators from the Kingston YMCA Farm Project. They organized their interest in Sojourner Truth's life into a local movement and called on local, county, and state officials to introduce legislation to commemorate the life and legacy of their local hero, Sojourner Truth, who they most wanted to celebrate.

Legislator Peter Criswell (City of Kingston, District 7) said, "I'm pleased to bring this legislation to the floor. I've been so impressed by the commitment and energy of these young women to honor the legacy of Sojourner Truth," said Legislator Criswell. "The historical figures we choose to honor really matter; they mean that young people, including young women of color, have models to look up to who represent and look like them. That means legislation like this really matters. It's fitting that a Black woman of this stature and historical importance is being celebrated with her own permanent day."



Legislator Peter Criswell (City of Kingston, District 7) visits the Kingston YMCA Farm Project and meets with the Youth Farm Crew to present the 2021 Legislative Proclamation designating November 26 as Sojourner Truth Day.



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Ani Castillo, empowerment coordinator, Kingston YMCA Farm Project, said, “It has been a privilege to learn about Sojourner Truth’s life and legacy. Her strength and resilience are a true inspiration. She risked her life to fight for herself, her family, and her people at a time when Black women had very little power. This has been an extraordinary experience and I am so proud that our project to honor Truth on November 26 will become an official commemorative day in Ulster County—and throughout New York State later this year.”

Briana Gary, empowerment coordinator, Kingston YMCA Farm Project, states, “Having a countywide day to honor Sojourner Truth is an amazing accomplishment. Truth is such a monumental figure. She’s a mother who escaped to freedom with her infant daughter. She freed her son from slavery. She was an abolitionist and women’s rights activist. She gave incredible speeches. Her ability to prevail against hardships and barriers is inspiring. She is so deserving of a day of recognition—it would be unjust not to celebrate her extraordinary accomplishments.” Gary adds, “I hope this leads to more youth-led initiatives to honor historical figures.”

Aleshane Emanuel, empowerment coordinator, Kingston YMCA Farm Project, said, “I believe that Sojourner Truth Day is a much-needed day. This initiative is important to more than just Ulster County because Sojourner is more than just a local heroine. Her efforts and accomplishments are outstanding and have shaped generations past, present, and future. Sojourner fought to honor the historical truth that this country so often wants to bury. Acknowledging Sojourner Truth’s power, and the power that all Black women carry, is something to celebrate.”

Jessica Alonso, empowerment coordinator, Kingston YMCA Farm Project, shares, “It feels so good to know that Ulster County, Sojourner Truth’s birthplace and the place where she took her first steps to freedom, will always have a day for honoring and celebrating her. She is a groundbreaking local, state, and national hero so this day is truly long overdue.”

“We invite you to celebrate Truth’s legacy by making November 26 a day for solidarity and community, a day to uplift and support your neighbors, and of course, a day to reflect on Truth’s actions and what they’ve meant for history. Make it a day to honor Black women like Sojourner, who have paved the way and made it possible for future generations to continue to fight for antiracist policy; and to celebrate local activists currently fighting against injustice and systemic oppressions,” says Alonso. “Happy Sojourner Truth Day! We can’t wait to celebrate with you on November 26.”

About Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth was born Isabella Baumfree to enslaved parents in the Town of Esopus over 225 years ago. Around age nine, she was separated from her parents and sold several times before claiming her freedom in 1826—one year before New York’s law to abolish slavery was to take effect. After Truth’s enslaver failed to honor his promise to free her, Truth bravely walked 11.5 miles to freedom over the Shaupepeak Ridge carrying her infant daughter Sophia.

In 1828, Truth became the first Black woman in the United States to win a lawsuit against a white man when she took her enslaver to court for illegally selling her five-year-old son to an Alabama slave owner. The landmark case resulted in Truth being reunited with her son Peter.

As a free woman, she chose the name Sojourner Truth in 1843, inspired by the belief that God was calling on her to travel and preach about the causes she believed in—a belief that would later inform her prolific speeches against slavery and make her a leader of the women’s and civil rights movements.

Across Ulster County, Sojourner Truth’s memory lives on, in large part due to community-led efforts championed by local residents, like the team of young empowerment coordinators of the Kingston YMCA Youth Crew.

Watch Online

Legislative Session, Tuesday, February 15, 2022

Due to the COVID-19, Legislative Session on February 15, 2022, will be held remotely. The public can watch online via the Legislature’s vimeo livestream feed at <https://livestream.com/accounts/1512750/events/1824203>

Public Comment via Call in Studio

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